

Ukraine-NATO: «Invite us»...?

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Recent developments brought new reasons to discuss the issue of Ukraine's declared multi-vector foreign policy and achievements in terms of implementing that approach. The recent statements made by Ukrainian leaders on various occasions in which they took part showed how broadly a concept might be viewed.

The notoriously multi-vector foreign policy shifted rapidly from the announcement of Ukraine's decision to subscribe as an observer to the newly formed Eurasian Economic Commonwealth to the information about Foreign Minister Zlenko's participation in the NATO summit in Reykjavik, and from President Kuchma's dinner in Brussels with Romano Prodi to Kuchma's informal meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi.

The Sochi meeting turned one of the vectors of Ukraine's foreign policy towards the Eurasian Economic Commonwealth (EurAzES). While earlier on the formation was regarded as a certain opposition to the GUUAM in the post-Soviet environment, today the situation has undergone remarkable transformation. Commenting on results of the Sochi meeting, Leonid Kuchma announced he did not exclude that Ukraine could become a full member of the EurAzES, and its observer status in the alliance is a «voluntary step». Possibly, «further, deeper steps in that direction are not far away», for, according to the Ukrainian president, the proposal for Ukraine to become «a full-fledged member of the EurAzES market» is «very important». It would be good, however, if public opinion were also taken into account in such cases.

Meanwhile, at the dinner with Romano Prodi Leonid Kuchma stressed the importance of Ukraine's European integration course. Generally, the issue of European integration in the Ukrainian context resembles a Russian folklore line: «the tale is told fast, but the business is not done fast». Almost nothing is known about the contents of the Kuchma-Prodi discussion. Officially it was announced that the two men discussed further prospects for development of relations between Ukraine and the European Union that were expected to be addressed in more detail during the 6th summit Ukraine-EU in Copenhagen on July 4. Romano Prodi said that the talk involved detailed analysis of the issue of granting the status of a special neighbour for Ukraine – an institution created by the EU for Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. It was argued that the introduction of the new status means a new stage of relations with the EU. For, as the Ukrainian president put it, «neither we nor the EU want the new division lines to emerge» (UNIAN, May 15, 2002).

It seems to be a common agreement that the real sense and scope of relations between Ukraine and the EU depends to a large extent on Ukraine's clear and consistent position. It is hardly productive to declare the European direction as predominant policy line, and simultaneously

accept the specially introduced observer status in the EurAsES. The task of setting clear priorities remains one of the key points for Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the statements of Ukrainian officials have become more realistic when it comes to prospects for Ukraine's membership in the EU. In Brussels Leonid Kuchma announced «Ukraine will raise the issue of membership no sooner than it achieves European standards» (UNIAN, May 16, 2002). Given the recent dynamics, it appears that Ukraine is not going to achieve those standards very soon. Hence, notwithstanding the declarations, Ukraine's movement towards the EU remains at the levels of statements about the need to deepen and broadening the integration efforts.

The EU enlargement to the East goes at about the same time as NATO eastward enlargement, and the two processes form some sort of an «enlargement package». Requirements to potential candidates to join both NATO and the EU include those of democracy, respect for rule of law, similar social and economic values, absence of disputes with neighbors. New formats of cooperation with NATO were suggested in the recently presented Ukrainian program at the NATO meeting in Reykjavik on May 14. The «historic» meaning of the meeting was the new quality of relations between NATO and Russia. The change in relations reflected the change in perspectives on formation of the security architecture after September 11. The essence of new relations between NATO and Russia is reflected in their new agreement about the formation of a new cooperation body that will be not only a mechanism for bilateral consultations but also Russia's direct involvement in decision-making on issues of fighting terrorism, ensuring nonproliferation, managing crises, fostering safety of navigation and coupling with natural disasters. While Russia will not have a right to veto NATO's decisions, it looks like the relationship is transforming into the «20» format.

The NATO-Russia relations have spanned from freeze to warming and back. So far Russia has always opposed NATO enlargement to the East. Now its views may undergo transformation as the NATO architecture itself transforms. While still unhappy about the idea of NATO's eastward enlargement, Russia's political ambitions draw it closer to that security structure. In a sense, the new relationship may be seen as a kind of compensation to Russia from NATO as NATO hopes to cross the «red line» drawn by Moscow under Yeltsin's presidency and adopt three former Soviet states of the Baltics (see Den, May 16, 2002).

The new configuration of the NATO-Russian relations may both help and hinder Ukraine's prospects for new quality of cooperation with the Alliance. While Russia's current positive views on NATO may be extrapolated onto Ukraine's declared intention to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures, the negative implications for the division of regional roles are also possible. The choice in favor of either of the options is to an extent determined by the official Kyiv.

Commenting on the Reykjavik agreements, President Kuchma announced he «welcomes such steps of Russia and will go the same way» (Forum, May 16, 2002). Russian leader Vladimir Putin was quoted as hoping that «Ukraine will not stay aside the process of broadening the interaction with NATO», but refrained from predictions as to whether Ukraine would actually join the Alliance while stating that such a decision «should be made by Ukraine itself».

In the past Ukraine used to go a few steps ahead of Russia in relations with NATO. Nowadays the situation is changing. The start of official cooperation between Ukraine and NATO is believed to be made by the official visit of NATO Secretary General at that time, Manfred Woerner, to Kyiv in November 1992. Later than year President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk visited the NATO headquarters in Brussels. On February 8, 1994, Ukraine became the first CIS state to sign the framework document of the Partnership for Peace. On September 14, 1995, an individual program of the Ukraine-NATO partnership within the PfP was signed. The next step that brought Ukraine closer to NATO was the special partnership Charter signed in Madrid on July 9, 1997. The Charter outlines the main guidelines for the Ukraine-NATO cooperation and steps towards the pursuit of those objectives. The NATO Information and Documentation Center, the first one in Eastern Europe, was opened in Kyiv in 1997. In February 1998, the joint Ukraine-NATO working group on military reform was formed.

In accordance with the Charter, a joint standing Ukraine-NATO commission was established with the task to organize regular consultations and to adopt annual working programs. On October 10, 1997, the Commission held the first meeting in Brussels, followed with a meeting of foreign ministers of Ukraine and the NATO member states. In November 1998, a program of cooperation with NATO till 2001 was presented to the policy community. The document stipulated that «Ukraine's strategic goal is full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures and full participation in the collective security system». The ways perceived as leading to the achievement of the goal included «development of constructive cooperation with security structures that exist on the European continent – NATO, the EU, the WES, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the OSCE and the Council of Europe». As the 1998 decree put it, «by developing cooperation with NATO, Ukraine seeks to ensure its independence, democratic development and territorial integrity, to strengthen external national security guarantees, and to counter the emergence of new threats to stability and security in the CEE region, of which Ukraine is an integral part. Ukraine also sought to use the experience and assistance of NATO member states in building its own Armed Forces and other formations.

In fact, the same priorities were declared in Ukraine's Program for Cooperation with NATO in 2001-2004, approved by the decree of the President of Ukraine on January 28, 2001/ The program was seen as a «logical continuation of the previous one» and was expected to ensure «maximally fullness and quality of implementation of the Charter. The program was based on the Constitution of Ukraine, the Main Directions of Foreign Policy of Ukraine, the Fundamentals of National Security of Ukraine, the Military Doctrine and a number of other legal acts. The main steps in development of relations between Ukraine and NATO, in addition to the opening of the NATO Information and Documentation center, were the Memorandum of Understanding in the civil planning of response to natural disasters and emergencies (signed in 1997) that created the foundations for cooperation in countering non-military challenges, as well as the opening of the Liaison Office in Kyiv to facilitate the institutional interaction between NATO and Ukrainian entities that are involved in peace-keeping operations and carry out the Working Plan of the Ukraine-NATO commission. The NATO leaders met the Ukrainian top officials a number of times and repeatedly stressed the need for a deeper cooperation with NATO.

Dynamics and potential of Ukraine's relations with NATO have not been used in full yet. Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic claims looked like a marathon race when the speed is slow and the

finish is too far to see. As a result, Ukraine is currently an outsider of the integration processes. The present forms of cooperation with NATO need to be filled with a new content and brought to new levels, given the new relations between NATO and Russia and the arrival of NATO to Ukraine's borders. The new reality is understood both in Kyiv and in Brussels. During the recent visit of NATO Secretary General George Robertson to Kyiv, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Anatoly Zlenko stated that «analyzing the Charter on special partnership between Ukraine and NATO we may conclude that some of its provisions have been fulfilled, or, possibly, to a large extent over-fulfilled...» Are the Ukrainian and NATO elites prepared for deeper relations? The point is not having more consultations but deciding whether or not Ukraine will apply for NATO membership and whether it is ready or comply with the standards and requirements. In addition to a number of social and economic issues, there is still an unresolved issue of the Ukraine-Romania debate on whom the Snake Island belongs to. Another issue would be to modernize Ukraine's military equipment in accordance with the NATO standards. Obviously, the economic realities are to be taken into account: how much such an adjustment would cost for Ukraine and whether it would be able to find the necessary funds. Though, it seems that the political will, again, will be a determining factor.

Although declaring their positive feelings towards NATO, the Ukrainian political elites still have not expressed any clear vision on possible formats for future cooperation, and, particularly, on a possibility that Ukraine would apply to join NATO. Noteworthy, unlike in 1998, election programs of parties and blocks that won the elections did not have any mention of «NATO», as the political forces limited themselves to obscure hints to their desire to integrate. Meanwhile, some of the results of the Ukraine-NATO commission meeting in Reykjavik can offer some optimism – as well as Leonid Kuchma's reply to a question whether Ukraine was prepared to join NATO if it was invited. «Invite us,» President Kuchma said and announced that Ukraine is prepared to cooperate with NATO to an extent to which the Alliance would agree. Never before Ukrainian top officials were publicly so open on the issue.

The search for new formats for cooperation was the key objective of the meeting of the Ukraine-NATO commission in Reykjavik. According to Ukraine's Foreign Minister Anatoly Zlenko, Ukrainian part of the commission «managed to outline the vision of the situation that has been formed in our geopolitical space» (UNIAN, May 16, 2002). In his opinion, the Russia-NATO rapprochement raises the issue of cooperation for Ukraine in an absolutely new light. On May 16 Zlenko also met NATO Secretary General George Robertson to discuss ways to intensify and deepen Ukraine's relations with NATO. According to the report of the UNIAN news agency, the discussion focused on the role of Ukraine in the new geopolitical situation on the continent after the NATO enlargement and the issue of modernizing the quality of the strategy of relations between Kyiv and Brussels.

The final document did include something about Ukraine: it stated that the decision had been made to give a new push and a new meaning to the partnership (Den, May 16, 2002). The Cooperation Council was authorized to draft new mechanisms and methods based on the special partnership Charter and raise the relations to a new level – though mainly by means of increasing the number of consultations. The proposed measures differ noticeably from the new level of dialogue between NATO and Russia. It is expected that the prospects for deepening relations between NATO and Ukraine will be outlined during further meetings and new formats of

cooperation will be introduced. However, the changes will directly depend on Ukraine's views on its relations with NATO – obviously, if the priority «vector» of Ukraine's foreign policy does not shift to the other side again.